or burned, that tell us, when we come across them on a forest path, the secret of the buried tree, the mystery that nourished the leaves, the deep-reaching muscles of the vegetable kingdom. Tragic and shaggy, they show us a new beauty: they are sculptures molded by the depths of the earth: nature's secret masterpieces.

Once Rafael Alberti and I were walking together, with waterfalls, thickets, and woods all around us, near Osorno, and he pointed out that each branch was different from the next, the leaves seemed to be competing for an infinite variety of style. "They look as if they had been selected by a landscape gardener for a magnificent park," he said. Years later, in Rome, Rafael remembered that walk and the natural abundance of our forests.

That is what it was like. It isn't, not any more. I grow sad, thinking of my wanderings as a boy and as a young man, between Boroa and Carahue, or around Toltén in the hills along the coast. How many discoveries! The graceful bearing and the fragrance of the cinnamon tree after the rain, the mosses whose winter beard hangs from the forest's innumerable faces!

I pushed aside the fallen leaves, trying to uncover the lightning streak of some beetles: the golden carabus, who dresses in iridescence to dance a minuscule ballet under the roots.

Or later, when I rode across the mountains to the Argentine side, under the green domes of the giant trees, an obstacle loomed up ahead: the root of one of them, taller than our mounts, blocking our way. Strenuous work and the ax made the crossing possible. Those roots were like overturned cathedrals: greatness laid bare to overwhelm us with its grandeur.

9

Beginning and End of Exile

IN THE SOVIET UNION

In 1949, my exile just over, I was invited for the first time to the Soviet Union, to the celebration of Pushkin's sesquicentennial. The twilight and I came at the same time to my appointment with the cold pearl of the Baltic, the ancient, new, noble, heroic Leningrad. The city of Peter the Great and Lenin the Great has "angel," like Paris. A gray angel: steel-colored avenues, lead-colored stone palaces, and a steel-green sea. The most magnificent museums in the world, the treasures of the Tsars, their paintings, their uniforms, their dazzling jewels, their ceremonial dress, their weapons, their tableware, were all before my eyes. And the new, immortal mementos: the cruiser *Aurora*, whose cannons backed Lenin's thought, knocked down the walls of the past, and opened history's doors.

I was there for an appointment with a poet dead over a hundred years, Alexander Pushkin, author of imperishable legends and novels. This prince of poets of the people holds the heart of the great Soviet Union. To celebrate his sesquicentennial, the Russians had reconstructed the palace of the Tsars, stone by stone. Each wall had been rebuilt exactly as it had existed in the past, rising again from the dusty rubble to which it had been reduced by Nazi artillery. The old blueprints of the palace, the documents of the times, were consulted to reconstruct the luminous windows, the

embroidered cornices, the flowery capitals. To build a museum in honor of an extraordinary poet of another era.

What first impressed me in the U.S.S.R. was the feeling of immensity it gives, of unity within that vast country's population, the movements of the birches on the plains, the huge forests so miraculously unspoiled, the great rivers, the horses running like waves across the wheat fields.

I loved the Soviet land at first sight, and I realized that not only does it offer a moral lesson for every corner of the globe where human life exists, a way of comparing possibilities, an ever increasing progress in working together and sharing, but I sensed, too, that an extraordinary flight would begin from this land of steppes, which preserved so much natural purity. The entire human race knows that a colossal truth is being worked out there, and the whole world awaits eagerly to see what will happen. Some wait in terror, others simply wait, still others believe they can see what is coming.

I was in the middle of a forest where thousands of peasants in traditional festive costumes were listening to Pushkin's poems. Everything hummed with life: men, leaves, vast stretches of land where the new wheat was beginning to show its first signs of life. Nature seemed to form a triumphant union with man. Out of those poems of Pushkin's in the Mikhailovsky forest, the man who would fly to other planets must inevitably rise.

A heavy rain came down while the peasants were at the celebration. A lightning bolt struck close to us, charring a man and the tree sheltering him. It all seemed a part of the torrential natural scene. What's more, that poetry accompanied by rain was already in my books, it concerned me.

The Soviet countryside is steadily changing. Huge cities and canals are under construction; the geography itself is altering. But even on that first visit I recognized the affinities that linked me to them, and also everything that seemed beyond my grasp or farthest from my spirit.

In Moscow, writers live in constant ferment, a continual exchange of ideas. There, long before the scandalmongering West discovered it, I learned that Pasternak and Mayakovsky were the best Soviet poets. Mayakovsky was the public poet, with thundering voice and a countenance like bronze, a magnanimous heart that revolutionized language and met head-on the most difficult problems in political poetry. Pasternak was a great poet of evening shadows, of metaphysical inwardness, and politically an honest reactionary who in the transformation of his country saw no further than an enlightened deacon. Yet the severest critics of his static political views often recited Pasternak's poems to me by heart.

The existence of a Soviet dogmatism in the arts for long periods of time cannot be denied, but it should also be mentioned that this dogmatism was always considered a defect and combated openly. With the critical essays of Zhdanov, a brilliant dogmatist, the personality cult produced a serious hardening in attitude toward the development of Soviet culture. But there were rebuttals from every quarter, and we know that life is stronger and more obstinate than precepts. The revolution is life; precepts prepare their own grave.

Ehrenburg is advanced in age but is still one of the most genuine and ebullient of the great agitators of Soviet culture. I often visited my good friend at his apartment on Gorky Street, where Picasso paintings and lithographs lined the walls, or at his dacha near Moscow. Ehrenburg has a passion for plants and is almost always in his garden pulling weeds and conclusions out of everything that grows around him.

Later the poet Kirsanov, who translated my poetry into Russian so admirably, became a good friend of mine. Like all Soviet poets, Kirsanov is an ardent patriot. In his poetry there are brilliant flashes and the rich music of the beautiful Russian language, which his pen releases into the air in cascades.

Another poet I frequently visited in Moscow and in the country was a Turk, Nazim Hikmet, a legendary writer kept in prison for eighteen years by his country's bizarre governments. Accused of attempting to incite the Turkish navy into rebellion, Nazim was condemned to the punishments of hell. The trial was held on a warship. He told me he was forced to walk on the ship's bridge until he was too weak to stay on his feet, then they stuck him into a section of the latrines where the excrement rose half a meter above the floor. My brother poet felt his strength failing him. The stench made him reel. Then the thought

struck him: my tormentors are keeping an eye on me, they want to see me drop, they want to watch me suffer. His strength came back with pride. He began to sing, low at first, then louder, and finally at the top of his lungs. He sang all the songs, all the love poems he could remember, his own poems, the ballads of the peasants, the people's battle hymns. He sang everything he knew. And so he vanquished the filth and his torturers. When he told me those things I said to him: "You sang for all of us, my brother. We need have no doubts any longer, or wonder what to do. We know now that we must begin to sing."

He also told me of the sufferings of his people. The peasants are brutally persecuted by feudal lords in Turkey. Nazim would see them arrive in prison; he would watch them swapping for tobacco the crust of bread doled out to them as their daily ration. Eventually, they would begin looking at the grass distractedly. Then with closer attention, almost avidly. And one day they would stuff a few blades of grass into their mouths. Later they would pull up fistfuls and gulp them down. In the end, they would eat the grass on all fours, like horses.

Passionately anti-dogmatic, Nazim has lived many long years of exile in the U.S.S.R. His love for this country, which took him in, comes tumbling out in his words: "I believe in the future of poetry. I believe, because I am living in the country where the soul craves poetry more than anything else." Many secrets that people have to see for themselves vibrate in these words. The Soviet man, with doors open to him in all the libraries, all the classrooms, all the theaters, is at the center of the writers' thoughts. This is something that should not be forgotten when the objectives of literary action come under discussion. On the one hand, the new forms, the urgent renewal of all that exists, must transcend and break down literary molds. On the other, how can one fail to fall in step with such a profound and far-flung revolution? How can one exclude from one's central themes the victories, conflicts, human problems, abundances, progress, growth, of an immense country facing a total change in political, economic, and social systems? How can one not make common cause with a people battered by ferocious invasions, hemmed in by implacable colonialists, obscurantists of every stripe and color? Can literature or the arts assume an air of ethereal independence before events of such vital significance?

The sky is white. By four in the afternoon it is black. From that hour on, night blankets the city.

Moscow is a winter city. It is a beautiful city of winter. The snow has settled on the infinitely repeated roofs. The pavements shine, invariably clean. The air is hard transparent glass. A soft steel color, the tiny feathers of the snow swirling about, the coming and going of thousands of passers-by as if they didn't feel the cold, all of it suggests a dream in which Moscow becomes a huge winter palace with extraordinary ornamentations, ghostly as well as living ones.

It is thirty degrees below zero in this Moscow set like a star of fire and snow, a burning heart, in the earth's breast.

I look out the window. There's an honor guard in the streets. What is happening? Even the snow is motionless where it has fallen. It is the great Vishinsky's funeral. The streets clear solemnly to let the procession pass. A profound silence settles down, a peacefulness in the heart of winter, for the great soldier. Vishinsky's fire returns to the roots of the Soviet mother country.

The soldiers who presented arms as the procession went past remain in formation. From time to time, one of them performs a little jig, raising his gloved hands and stomping his high boots for a second. Other than this, they seem immutable.

A Spanish friend told me that during World War II, immediately after a bombing, on the most intensely cold days, the Muscovites could be seen eating ice cream in the streets. "I knew then that they would win the war," my friend said, "when I saw them eating ice cream so calmly in the middle of a horrifying war and in below-zero weather."

The trees in the park, white with snow, are frosted over. Nothing can match these crystallized petals in the parks, during the Moscow winter. The sun makes them translucent, drawing white flames from them, but not one drop melts from their flower patterns. This is an arborescent world that lets us glimpse, through its spring garden of snow, the Kremlin's ancient towers, the thousand-year-old slender spires, the golden domes of St. Basil's.

After leaving the outskirts of Moscow, on the way to another city, I see broad white highways. They are frozen rivers. On those still river beds the silhouetted figure of a fisherman absorbed

in himself appears, from time to time, like a fly on a glossy tablecloth. The fisherman halts at that long frozen sheet, picks out a spot, and drills the ice until he has an opening through which the buried current can be seen. He can't catch anything right away because the fish have fled, frightened by the iron that made the hole. Then the fisherman sprinkles a little food to lure the runaways back. He drops his hook and waits. He waits for hours on end in that hellish cold.

The work of writers, I say, has much in common with the work of these Arctic fishermen. The writer has to look for the river, and if he finds it frozen over, he has to drill a hole in the ice. He must have a good deal of patience, weather the cold and the adverse criticism, stand up to ridicule, look for the deep water, cast the proper hook, and after all that work, he pulls out a tiny little fish. So he must fish again, facing the cold, the water, the critic, eventually landing a bigger fish, and another and another.

I was invited to a writers' congress. In the seats of honor were the great fishermen, the great writers of the Soviet Union. Fadeyev with his white smile and his silver hair; Fedin with the face of an English fisherman, thin and sharp; Ehrenburg with his turbulent shock of hair and his suit which, even when worn for the first time, gives the impression of having been slept in; Tikhonov.

Also on the dais, with Mongolian features and their recently printed books, were the spokesmen of the farthest Soviet republics, peoples I had never even heard mentioned by name before, nomad countries with no alphabets.

INDIA REVISITED

In 1950 I had to make a sudden visit to India. In Paris, Joliot-Curie sent for me to ask me to go on a mission. I was to travel to New Delhi, get in touch with people of different political views, gauge on the spot the chances of strengthening the Indian movement for peace.

Joliot-Curie was the world president of the Partisans for Peace. We had a long talk. He was worried because pacifist opinion carried so little weight in India, although India had always been widely known as the pacifist country par excellence. The Prime

Minister himself, Nehru, was generally recognized as a leading advocate of peace, a time-honored and deep-rooted cause in that country.

Joliot-Curie handed me two letters: one for a scientist in Bombay, and the other to be delivered personally to the Prime Minister. It seemed strange to me that I should be the one picked for such a long trip and a task apparently so simple. Perhaps my enduring love for that country, where I had spent some years in my youth, had something to do with it. Or else the fact that I had received the Peace Prize that same year for *Que despierte el leñador*, a distinction accorded Pablo Picasso and Nazim Hikmet also.

I boarded the plane for Bombay. I was going back to India thirty years later. It was no longer a colony fighting for its emancipation, but a sovereign republic: the dream of Gandhi, whose first congresses I had attended in 1928. Perhaps none of my friends from those days were alive, revolutionary students who had confided their stories of struggle to me, like brothers.

I got off the plane and headed straight for customs. From there I would go to some hotel, deliver the letter to the physicist Raman, and go on to New Delhi. I hadn't counted on my hosts. My suitcases were taking forever to get out of the place. A number of people I thought were customs inspectors were going through my baggage with a fine-tooth comb. I had seen many inspections, but never one like this. My luggage did not amount to much, only a medium-sized suitcase with my clothes, and a small leather bag containing my toilet articles. But my trousers, my shorts, my shoes were lifted out and checked over by five pairs of eyes. Pockets and seams were explored with meticulous attention. In Rome I had wrapped my shoes, so as not to soil my clothes, in a wrinkled newspaper I had found in my hotel room. I believe it was the *Osservatore Romano*. They spread the page on a table, held it up to the light, folded it as carefully as if it were a secret document, and finally put it aside with some of my papers. My shoes were also studied inside and out, like unique samples of fabulous fossils.

This incredible search lasted two hours. They made an elaborate bundle with my papers (passport, address book, the letter I was to hand the head of state, and the page from the *Osservatore*

Romano) and ceremoniously secured it with sealing wax before my eyes. Then I was told I could go on to a hotel.

Using all my will power so as not to lose our proverbial Chilean patience, I remarked that no hotel would allow me to register without identification papers and that the object of my trip to India was to hand the Prime Minister a letter, which I could not deliver because they had confiscated it.

"We'll talk to the hotel and they will take you in. As for the papers, we'll return them to you in due time."

This was the country whose struggle for independence was part of my experience as a young man, I thought. I shut my suitcase and my mouth simultaneously. A single word crossed my mind: Shit!

At the hotel I ran into Professor Baera and told him of my mishaps. He was a good-natured Hindu. He passed these incidents off lightly. He had a tolerant attitude toward his country, which he considered still in the process of formation. I, on the other hand, saw something perverse in that chaos, something very far from the welcome I had expected from a newly independent country.

Joliot-Curie's friend, to whom I had brought a letter of introduction, was the director of nuclear-physics studies in India. He invited me to visit their installations, adding that we had been asked to lunch that same day by the Prime Minister's sister. Such has been my luck, and such it continues to be, all my life: one hand rams me in the ribs with a club, and the other offers me a bouquet of flowers to make up for it.

The Institute for Nuclear Research was one of those clean, bright, luminous places where men and women dressed in gauzy white circulate like running water, crossing corridors, steering their way around instruments, blackboards, and trays. I understood only a small part of the scientific explanations, but the visit was a purifying bath that washed off the stains of humiliation suffered at the hands of the police. I have a dim memory of seeing what looked like a bowl with some mercury in it. Nothing more surprising than this metal, which displays its energy like some form of animal life. Its mobility, its capacity for liquid, spherical, magical transformation, has always caught my imagination.

I have forgotten the name of Nehru's sister, with whom we had lunch that day. My ill humor dissipated in her presence. She was a woman of great beauty, made up and dressed like an exotic actress. Her sari flashed with color. Gold and pearls heightened her air of opulence. I took to her immediately. It was quite a contrast to see such a refined woman eating with her hand, sticking her long, jeweled fingers into the rice and curry sauce. I told her I was on my way to New Delhi to see her brother and the friends of world peace. She replied that, in her opinion, all the people of India should join the movement.

At the hotel that afternoon I was given the packet with my papers. The double-faced police had broken the sealing wax they themselves had affixed to it after packing up the documents in front of me. They must have photographed them all, including my laundry bills. I eventually found out that the people whose addresses were in my book had all been visited and interrogated by the police. Among them was Ricardo Güiraldes's widow, who was my sister-in-law then. This shallow woman was a theosophist, and her one passion was the Asian philosophies; she lived in a remote Indian village. She was subjected to a good deal of harassment because her name was in my address book.

In New Delhi I met with six or seven of the Indian capital's leading personalities the very day of my arrival, sitting under a sunshade for protection from the celestial fire. They were writers, philosophers, Hindu or Buddhist priests, the kind of Indians who are so adorably simple, so stripped of all pretension. Everyone agreed that the supporters of the peace movement were acting in the spirit of their ancient country, with its unbroken tradition of goodness and understanding. They wisely added that they thought any sectarian or hegemonic leanings should be corrected: neither the Communists nor the Buddhists nor the middle class should arrogate the movement. The important thing, the crux of the matter, was that all factions should contribute. I agreed with them.

The Chilean ambassador, Dr. Juan Marín, writer and physician, and an old friend of mine, came to see me at dinnertime. After many circumlocutions, he explained that he had had an interview with the chief of police. With the typical calmness the authorities

adopt when talking to diplomats, the head of the Indian police had told him that my activities worried the Indian government and that he hoped I would leave the country soon. I told the ambassador that my sole activity had been to speak, in the hotel's garden, with six or seven eminent persons whose ideas, I assumed, were common knowledge. As for me, I said, the minute I deliver Joliot-Curie's message to the Prime Minister, I'll no longer be interested in staying in a country that, in spite of my proven sympathy for its cause, treats me so discourteously, without any reason whatever.

My Ambassador had been one of the founders of the Socialist Party in Chile, but he had softened up, possibly because of the years and his diplomatic privileges. He did not resent the Indian government's stupid attitude, and I did not ask him for his support. We parted amiably—he relieved of the heavy responsibility my visit placed on him, and I with all my illusions about his sensibility and his friendship lost forever.

Nehru had granted me an appointment for the following morning in his office. He rose and shook my hand without any trace of a welcoming smile. His face has been photographed so often that it's not worth the trouble of describing. Dark, cold eyes looked at me without feeling. Thirty years before, he and his father had been introduced to me at a huge rally for independence. I mentioned this to him, but it produced no change in his face. He replied in monosyllables to everything I said, scrutinizing me with his steady, cold eyes.

I handed him the letter from his friend Joliot-Curie. He told me he had great respect for the French scientist, and took his time reading the letter. In it Curie spoke of me and asked Nehru to assist me in my mission. He finished, put the letter back into its envelope, and looked at me without a word. It suddenly struck me that my presence provoked an involuntary dislike in him. It also crossed my mind that this man with a bilious complexion must be going through a bad physical, political, or emotional experience. There was something high and mighty about him, something stiff, as if he was accustomed to giving orders but lacked the strength of a leader. I recalled that his father, Pandit Motilal, zamindar or landowner of the old breed of feudal lords, had been Gandhi's grand treasurer and had helped the Congress movement

not only with his political wisdom but also with his large fortune. I thought perhaps the silent man before me had in some subtle way reverted to a "zamindar" and was staring at me with the same indifference and contempt he would have shown one of his barefoot peasants.

"What shall I tell Professor Joliot-Curie when I return to Paris?"

"I shall answer his letter," he said dryly.

I was silent for a few minutes that seemed an eternity. Apparently Nehru did not feel at all like saying anything more to me, yet he didn't show the slightest sign of restlessness, as if it would have been all right for me to remain there without any reason whatever, squelched by the feeling that I was wasting the time of such an important man.

I felt that I had to say a few words about my mission. The cold war threatened to turn red hot at any moment now. A new cataclysm could swallow humanity. I mentioned the terrible danger of nuclear weapons. And how important it was for those who want to avoid war to stick together.

He continued buried in his thoughts, as if he hadn't heard me. After a few moments he said, "As a matter of fact, both sides are pelting each other with arguments about peace."

"Personally," I said, "I think all those who talk of peace or want to contribute something to it can belong to the same side, to the same movement. We don't want to exclude anyone, except those who preach revenge and war."

There was more silence. I realized that the conversation was over. I rose to my feet and put out my hand to take my leave. He shook my hand silently. As I walked to the door, he asked, with some friendliness, "Can I do anything for you? Is there anything you would like?"

I am very slow to react, and unfortunately for me, I am not malicious. However, for once in my life, I took the offensive: "Oh, yes! I almost forgot. I lived in India once, but I have never had a chance to visit the Taj Mahal, which is so close to New Delhi. This would have been a good time to see that magnificent monument, if the police had not notified me that I can't leave the city limits and must return to Europe as soon as possible. I am going back tomorrow."

Pleased with myself at getting in my little thrust, I said good-

bye quickly and left the office. The hotel manager was waiting for me at the reception desk. "I have a message for you. They've just called from the government offices to tell me that you may visit the Taj Mahal whenever you wish."

"Get my bill ready," I said. "I'm sorry I have to pass up that visit. I'm going to the airport right now, I'm taking the first plane to Paris."

Five years later, in Moscow, I had occasion to sit on the annual Lenin Peace Prize committee, an international assembly of which I was a part. When the moment came to present and vote on the year's candidates, the Indian delegate proposed Prime Minister Nehru's name. The shadow of a smile crossed my face, but none of the others on the jury understood it, and I voted affirmatively. The international prize consecrated Nehru as one of the champions of world peace.

MY FIRST VISIT TO CHINA

I visited China twice after the Revolution. The first time was in 1951, the year I was one of those commissioned to take the Lenin Peace Prize to Madam Soong Ch'ing-ling, Sun Yat-sen's widow.

She was receiving the gold medal for which she had been proposed by Kuo Mo-jo, Vice Premier of China and a writer. Kuo Mo-jo was also vice chairman of the prize committee, together with Aragon. Anna Seghers, the filmmaker Alexandrov, several others I don't remember, Ehrenburg, and I were also on the jury. There was a secret alliance between Aragon, Ehrenburg, and me which had enabled us to see that the prize was given, in other years, to Picasso, Bertolt Brecht, and Rafael Alberti. It had not been easy, of course.

We left for China on the Trans-Siberian Railroad. Getting into that legendary train was like boarding a ship that sailed on land into infinite and mysterious distances. Everything around me was yellow, for leagues and leagues, on either side of the window. It was mid-autumn and all we could see were silver birches with their yellow petals. And then, farther than the eye could see, the prairie, tundra, or taiga. From time to time, the stations of new cities. Ehrenburg and I would get out to stretch our legs. At the stations, peasants crowded in the waiting rooms with their bundles and suitcases, waiting for the train.

We barely had time to walk around a little in those places. They were all the same; each had a statue of Stalin, made of cement. Sometimes it was painted silver, and sometimes gold. Of the dozens we saw, all exactly alike, I don't know which was uglier, the silver or the gilt. Back on the train, Ehrenburg entertained me for a whole week with his skeptical and witty conversation. He was a deeply patriotic Russian, but he discussed many aspects of life in that era, smiling sardonically.

He had arrived in Berlin with the Red Army. He was undoubtedly the most brilliant war correspondent there has ever been. The Red soldiers loved this eccentric, shy man. Not long before, in Moscow, he had shown me two presents those soldiers had given him, after unearthing them from the German ruins. They were a rifle made by Belgian gunsmiths for Napoleon Bonaparte, and two minuscule volumes of the works of Ronsard, printed in France in 1650. The little volumes were singed, and stained with rain or blood.

Ehrenburg donated Napoleon's beautiful rifle to the French museums. "What do I want it for?" he said to me, stroking the tooled cannon and the burnished gunstock. But Ronsard's tiny books he lovingly kept for himself.

Ehrenburg was an ardent Francophile. On the train he recited one of his clandestine poems for me. It was a short love song to France, addressing her as the woman he loved.

I call the poem clandestine because this was the era when accusations of cosmopolitanism were rife in Russia. Newspapers often carried charges of obscurantism; all modern art seemed cosmopolitan to them. Such and such a writer or painter would fall into disgrace and suddenly have his name obliterated, under such a charge. Thus, like a hidden flower, Ehrenburg's Francophile poem had to keep its tenderness to itself.

Much of what Ehrenburg showed me would soon disappear forever during Stalin's dark night, disappearances I tended to blame on their dissident and contradictory character.

With his unruly locks, deep wrinkles, nicotine-stained teeth, cold gray eyes, and melancholy smile, Ehrenburg was the old skeptic, the great disillusioned man. I had recently opened my eyes to the great revolution and was blind to sinister details. I found little to quarrel with in the general poor taste of the time or in those statues smeared with gold and silver. Time would prove

that I was not right, but I don't think even Ehrenburg fully realized the immensity of the tragedy. Its magnitude would be revealed to us all by the Twentieth Congress.

The train seemed to move over the yellow stretches at a snail's pace, day after day, birch after birch. We had passed the Ural Mountains and were crossing Siberia.

We were having lunch in the dining car one day, when a table occupied by a soldier caught my eye. He was very drunk. He was a smiling young fellow whose cheeks bloomed with health. He kept ordering raw eggs from the waiter which he would break and drop on his plate with glee. Then he would immediately ask for a couple more. Judging by his ecstatic grin and his childish blue eyes, he was feeling mellower all the time. And he must have been at it for quite some time, because the yolks and whites were beginning to slide dangerously over the side of his plate, falling onto the floor of the car. "Tovarich!" The soldier called out to the waiter with enthusiasm and ordered new eggs to increase his treasure.

My eyes were fastened eagerly on this surrealist scene, so innocent and so unexpected in that Siberian emptiness, an oceanic setting.

The alarmed waiter finally called a military policeman. The guard, who was heavily armed, looked down at the soldier sternly, towering over him. But the soldier took no notice and went on busily breaking more and more eggs. I fully expected the policeman to jolt the wastrel out of his daydream. But I couldn't believe my eyes. The herculean guard sat down next to the boy, stroked his blond head tenderly, and began talking to him quietly, smiling, convincing him. Then he suddenly lifted him gently from his seat and led him away by the arm, like an older brother, through the car door to the station and into the streets of the town.

I thought bitterly of what would have happened to a poor drunken Indian if he had started breaking eggs on a trans-equatorial train.

During those trans-Siberian days, Ehrenburg could be heard energetically hammering away, morning and afternoon, at his

typewriter keys. There he finished *The Ninth Wave*, his last novel before *The Thaw*. For my part, I wrote, only sporadically, some of *Los versos del capitán*, love poems for Matilde, published anonymously later in Naples.

We left the train in Irkutsk. Before catching the plane for Mongolia, we went down for a stroll by the lake, celebrated Lake Baikal at the border of Siberia, the door to freedom in the time of the Tsars. The thoughts and dreams of prisoners and exiles wandered off toward that lake. It was the only possible way of escape. Baikal! Baikal! Low-pitched Russian voices still repeat it now, singing the old ballads.

The Institute for the Study of Lakes invited us to lunch. The scientists let us in on their secrets. No one has ever been able to determine the exact depth of this lake, son and eye of the Ural Mountains. Some unusual fish are taken from two thousand feet down, blind fish pulled out of its night-black depths. My appetite was whetted immediately and I asked the scientists if I could try a couple of those exotic fish at table. I am one of the few persons in the world who has eaten fish from those abysses, washed down with good Siberian vodka.

From there we flew to Mongolia. I have a hazy memory of that lunar landscape whose inhabitants still live in nomad's tents, while they establish their first printing presses, their first universities. On all sides of Ulan Bator a circular, infinite wasteland opens out, like the Atacama Desert in my country, interrupted only by clusters of camels that make the solitude more archaic. Incidentally, I tasted Mongolian whiskey, in magnificently wrought silver cups. Every people makes its alcoholic beverages from what they can. This one was made of fermented camel's milk. Shivers still run up and down my spine when I recall its taste. But how wonderful to have been in Ulan Bator! More so for someone like me who lives in all beautiful names. I live in them as in dream mansions intended just for me. And so I have lived, relishing every syllable, in Singapore's, in Samarkand's names. When I die, I want to be buried in a name, some especially chosen, beautiful-sounding name, so that its syllables will sing over my bones, near the sea.

The Chinese are among the people in the world who smile the most. They smile through implacable colonialism, revolutions,

famines, massacres, as no other people can. The smile of Chinese children is the most beautiful harvest of rice ever threshed by this immense populace.

But there are two kinds of Chinese smiles. There is a natural one that lights up the wheat-colored faces. This is the smile of the peasants and the vast majority of people. The other is a detachable, false smile that can be pasted on below the nose, and taken off. It's the smile of the officials.

When Ehrenburg and I landed for the first time at the Peking airport, it was hard for us to tell the two kinds of smiles apart. The real, the best ones, went around with us for many days. These were the smiles of our Chinese fellow writers, novelists and poets who welcomed us with noble hospitality. So we met Ting Ling, novelist, Stalin Prize winner, chairman of the Writers' Union; Mao Tung, Siao Emi, and charming Ai Ch'ing, old Communist and prince of Chinese poets. They spoke French or English. They were all dragged under by the Cultural Revolution years later. But at the time of our visit they were the flower of Chinese literature.

The next day, after the award-giving ceremony for the Lenin Prize, called the Stalin Prize then, we dined at the Soviet Embassy. In addition to the lady being honored, there was Chou Enlai, old Marshal Chu Teh, and several others. The ambassador had been a hero of Stalingrad, a typical Soviet soldier, who sang and called for one toast after another. I was seated next to Soong Ch'ing-ling, very dignified and still quite beautiful. She was the most respected female personality of the day.

Each of us had a small crystal decanter filled with vodka all to himself. There were frequent calls of "*Kanpai*," a Chinese toast that obliges you to drain your glass at one gulp, without leaving a drop. Old Marshal Chu Teh, across from me, never stopped filling his glass and, with his wide peasant's grin, egged me on to a new toast every few minutes. At the end of the meal, I chose a moment when the old strategist's attention was diverted, to try a drink from his bottle of vodka. My suspicions were confirmed. I discovered that the Marshal had been drinking just water with his meal, while I was gulping down large quantities of liquid fire.

At coffee time, my neighbor at table, Soong Ch'ing-ling, Sun Yat-sen's widow, the marvelous woman we had come to honor,

drew a cigarette out of her case. Then, with an exquisite smile, she held it out to me. "No, I don't smoke, thank you," I said to her. I admired her cigarette case, and she said, "I keep it as a memento of something very important in my life." It was a stunning object, solid gold, studded with diamonds and rubies. After examining it with great care and praising it once again, I returned it to its owner.

She forgot very quickly that I had given it back to her, because as we rose from the table she turned to me with a piercing look and said, "My cigarette case, please?"

I was positive I had returned it to her, but looked for it, anyway, on the table, then under it, without success. Sun Yat-sen's widow's smile had vanished and two black eyes pierced through me like implacable rays of light. The sacred object could not be found anywhere, and I was starting to feel absurdly responsible for its loss. Those two black rays were about to convince me that I was a jewel thief.

Fortunately, when I could bear it no longer, I saw the cigarette case reappear in her hands. She had simply found it in her bag, of course. She recovered her smile, but I did not smile again for ages. Now I have an idea that the Cultural Revolution probably relieved her of the lovely gold cigarette case for good.

At that time of year the Chinese wore blue, blue mechanic's coveralls that clothed men and women alike, giving them a unanimous, sky-blue look. No ragged clothing. But no automobiles either. Thick crowds packed every place, flowed in from everywhere.

It was the second year of the Revolution. There must have been shortages and difficulties in many places, but these were not noticeable in our tours of Peking. What particularly bothered Ehrenburg and me were small details, small tics in the system. When we wanted to buy a pair of socks and a handkerchief, it turned into a problem of state. Our Chinese comrades discussed it among themselves. After nervous deliberation on their part, we left the hotel in a caravan. Our car was in the lead, with those of the guards, the police, the interpreters bringing up the rear. The flock of cars roared off, opening its way through the crowd, which was always dense. We rolled like an avalanche down the

narrow channel opened by the people. When we reached the store, our Chinese friends jumped out, quickly herded all customers out of the store, halted traffic, formed a barrier with their bodies, a human passageway Ehrenburg and I went through with our heads down, to come out fifteen minutes later, our heads down once more, each with a little package in his hands, firmly determined never to buy another pair of socks in China.

These things used to infuriate Ehrenburg. Take the case of a restaurant, which I'm going to relate now. At the hotel they would serve us the awful English food China inherited from its colonial rulers. I am a great admirer of Chinese cooking and I told my young interpreter that I was dying to try Peking's famous cuisine. He replied that he would check into it.

I don't know whether he really did, but we had to go on chomping on the hotel's dull roast beef. I spoke to him about it again. He looked thoughtful and said to me, "Our comrades have met together several times to look into the situation. The problem is about to be solved."

On the following day an important member of the welcoming committee came to see us. After putting his smile on right, he asked if we really wanted to eat Chinese food. Ehrenburg said yes, definitely. I added that I had been familiar with Cantonese food since boyhood and was eager to taste the truly famous Peking condiments.

"This is somewhat of a problem," the Chinese comrade said, with a worried air. Silence. A shake of his head. Then he went on: "Almost impossible."

Ehrenburg smiled his confirmed skeptic's wry smile. I, on the other hand, was fit to be tied. "Comrade," I said to him, "please prepare my papers for my return to Paris. If I can't have Chinese food in China, I'll have it in the Latin Quarter, where it is not a problem."

My violent response got results. Four hours later, with our numerous committee leading the way, we arrived at a famous restaurant where they had prepared glazed duck for five hundred years. An exquisite, memorable dish.

Open day and night, the restaurant was a short three hundred meters from our hotel.

THE CAPTAIN'S VERSES

In the course of these wanderings from place to place as an exile, I came to a country I had never visited, and I learned to love it deeply: Italy. Everything in that country seemed fabulous to me. Especially the Italian simplicity: the olive oil, the bread and the wine of spontaneity. Even the police . . . The police, who never mistreated me but hounded me without respite. It was a police force I found everywhere, even in my sleep and in my soup.

Writers invited me to read my poems. I read them, in good faith, everywhere, in universities, in amphitheaters, to the dock workers of Genoa, in Florence at the Palazzo dell'Arte della Lana, in Turin, in Venice.

I read to capacity crowds with infinite pleasure. Someone next to me would repeat each poem after me in the sublime Italian tongue, and I liked to hear my poems with the added splendor of that magnificent language. The police, however, did not like it very much. In Castilian, fine, but the Italian version was full of ellipses. Lines in praise of peace, a word already proscribed by the "Western" world, and especially my poetry's slant in favor of the people's struggles, were dangerous.

In the municipal elections, the town council seats had gone to the people's parties and I was received as guest of honor at the stately town halls. Often, I was made an honorary citizen of the city. This was the case in Milan, Florence, and Genoa. The councilmen conferred their distinctions on me before or after my readings. Notables, aristocrats, and bishops would gather in the hall. We would drink a glass of champagne, which I accepted in behalf of my remote country. Between embraces and hand kissing I would finally make it down the front steps of the city hall. The police, who never gave me a moment's rest, would be waiting for me in the street.

What happened in Venice was a slapstick comedy. I gave my reading in the lecture hall. I was once more made an honorary citizen. But the police wanted me out of the city where Desdemona was born and suffered; they were stationed at the doors of my hotel, day and night.

My old friend Vittorio Vidali, Commandant Carlos, had come from Trieste to hear my poems. He shared with me the infinite

pleasure of riding over the canals and seeing from the gondola the ash-gray palaces going past. As for the police, they were pestering me more than ever, always at our heels, a couple of paces behind us. I decided to make my escape, like Casanova, from a Venice that was trying to bottle me up. I put on a burst of speed, with Vittorio Vidali and the Costa Rican writer Joaquín Gutiérrez, who happened to be with us. Two Venetian policemen charged after us. We managed to jump quickly into the only gondola in Venice with a motor, the Communist Mayor's. The municipal authority's gondola cut swiftly through the canal waters, while the representatives of the other authority scurried about like deer, looking for a boat. They took one of the many romantic vessels, painted black and with gold decorations, used by lovers in Venice. It followed us far off, hopelessly, like a duck chasing a sea dolphin.

All this persecution came to a head one morning in Naples. The police came to my hotel, not very early, because in Naples no one goes to work early, not even the police. Using an alleged error in my passport as a pretext, they asked me to accompany them to the prefecture. There they offered me an espresso and informed me that I must leave Italian soil that same day.

My love for Italy did not help me any.

"I am sure there's some misunderstanding," I said.

"Not at all. We think very highly of you, but you have to leave the country."

And then, in a roundabout way, as obliquely as possible, they let it be known that the Chilean Embassy was asking for my expulsion.

The train was leaving that afternoon. My friends were already at the station to say goodbye. Kisses. Flowers. Shouts. Paolo Ricci. The Alicattas. Many, many others. *Arrivederci. Adiós. Adiós.*

During my train ride to Rome, my police guards spared no efforts to be nice to me. They carried my suitcases aboard and stowed them away. They bought me *L'Unità* and *Paese Sera*, but by no means the rightist newspapers. They asked me for autographs, some for themselves and others for their relatives. I have never seen such well-mannered policemen: "We are sorry,

Eccellenza. We are poor, we have families to think of. We must obey orders. We hate to . . ."

At the station in Rome, where I had to get off to change trains to go on to the border, I was able to make out an enormous crowd from my window. I heard shouting. I saw great commotion and confusion. Armfuls of flowers advanced toward the train, raised over a river of heads. "Pablo! Pablo!"

When I went down the car's steps, elegantly guarded, I became the center of a swirling melee. In a matter of seconds, men and women writers, newsmen, deputies, perhaps close to a thousand persons, snatched me away from the hands of the police. The police, in turn, moved in and rescued me from the arms of my friends. During those dramatic moments I made out a few famous faces. Alberto Moravia and his wife, Elsa Morante, like him a novelist. The eminent painter Renato Guttuso. Other poets. Other painters. Carlo Levi, the celebrated author of *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, was holding out a bouquet of roses. In the midst of all this, flowers were spilling to the ground, hats and umbrellas flew, fist blows sounded like explosions. The police were getting the worst of it, and I was once more recovered by my friends. During the scuffle I had a glimpse of gentle Elsa Morante striking a policeman on the head with a silk parasol. Suddenly the luggage hand trucks were going by and I saw one of the porters, a corpulent *facchino*, bring a club down on a policeman's back. These were the Roman people backing me up. The fray became so confused that the police pulled me aside and appealed to me: "Talk to your friends. Tell them to calm down . . ."

The crowd was shouting: "Neruda stays in Rome. Neruda is not leaving Italy! Let the poet stay! Let the Chilean stay! Throw the Austrian out!" (The "Austrian" was De Gasperi, the Italian Prime Minister.)

After half an hour of the fracas, a superior order arrived, granting me permission to remain in Italy. My friends hugged and kissed me, and I left the station, sad to be walking on the flowers the battle had scattered everywhere.

I woke up the next morning in the house of a senator with parliamentary immunity; I had been taken there by the painter Renato Guttuso, who still didn't have much faith in the word of

the government authorities. I received a telegram from the island of Capri. It had been sent by the eminent historian Edwin Cerio, whom I did not know personally. He expressed indignation at what he considered an outrage, a desecration of Italian tradition and culture. He ended by offering me a villa where I could stay on Capri.

It all seemed a dream. And when I got to Capri, with Matilde Urrutia, my Matilde, the unreal sensation of dreaming increased.

We came to the marvelous island on a winter night. The coast loomed through the shadows, whitish and tall, unfamiliar and silent. What would happen? What would happen to us? A little horse carriage was waiting. Up and up the deserted nighttime streets the carriage climbed. White, mute houses, narrow vertical lanes. It finally pulled up and the coachman took our bags into the house, which was also white and apparently empty.

We went in and saw a fire blazing in the huge hearth. Standing in the glow of the burning candelabra was a tall man, with hair, beard, and suit equally white. He was Signore Edwin Cerio, historian and naturalist, who owned half of Capri. He stood out in the shadows like the image of *Taita* God in children's stories. He was almost ninety years old and he was the most distinguished man on the island.

"Make yourselves at home, no one will bother you here."

And he left us, thoughtfully contenting himself with sending short messages with news or advice, notes written in an exquisite hand, accompanied by a single leaf or a flower from his garden. For us, Edwin Cerio was the embodiment of the large, generous, and perfumed heart of Italy.

Afterwards I got to know his work, books that are more genuine than Axel Munthe's, though not as famous. Noble old Cerio repeated with roguish humor: "Capri's town square is God's masterpiece."

Matilde and I took refuge in our love. We went for long walks through Anacapri. The small island, divided into a thousand tiny orchards, has a natural splendor, too much commented on but strictly true. Among the rocks, wherever the sun and the wind beat down most, in the arid earth, diminutive plants and flowers burst out, grown in precise and exquisite patterns. This hidden Capri that you enter only after a long pilgrimage, after the tourist label has peeled off from your clothes, this popular Capri of rocks

and minuscule vineyards, of humble people, hard-working and natural people, has an absorbing charm. By now you have assimilated things and people; coachmen and fishwives know you; you are part of the hidden Capri of the poor; and you know where to find the good wine and where to buy the olives that the natives of Capri eat.

All those depraved things we read about in novels may take place behind high palace walls. But I shared a happy life in great solitude or among the simplest people in the world. Unforgettable time! I worked all morning at my poems and Matilde typed them in the afternoon. It was the first time we had lived together in the same house. In that place whose beauty was intoxicating, our love grew steadily. We could never again live apart. There I finished *Los versos del capitán*, a book of love, passionate but also painful, which was published later in Naples anonymously.

And now I am going to relate the story of this book, one of my most controversial works. It remained a secret for a long time, for a long time it did not carry my name on its cover, as if I were disowning it or as if the book itself did not know who its father was. There are natural children, offspring of natural love, and, in that sense, *Los versos del capitán* was a natural book.

The poems in it were written here and there, during my exile in Europe. They were published anonymously in Naples, in 1952. My love for Matilde, homesickness for Chile, the passions of social consciousness fill the pages of this book that went through many editions without its author's name.

For its first printing, the artist Paolo Ricci obtained some fine paper, antique Bodoni printing types, and engravings copied from Pompeian urns. Paolo also made up the list of subscribers, with brotherly devotion. The lovely volume was soon out, an edition of only fifty copies. We had a long celebration for this, with a table full of flowers, *frutti di mare*, wine as transparent as water, a unique offspring of the vines of Capri. And also with the cheer of friends who loved our love.

A few suspicious critics suggested political motives for the appearance of this book without a signature. "The party is against it, the party doesn't approve," they said. But it wasn't true. Fortunately, my party is not against expressions of beauty.

The real truth is that I did not want those poems to wound

Delia, whom I was leaving. Delia del Carril, sweetest of consorts, thread of steel and honey tied to me during the years when my poetry sang most, was my perfect mate for eighteen years. This book, filled with sudden and burning love, would have reached her like a rock hurled against her gentleness. That, only that, was the profound, personal, respectable reason for my anonymity.

Later, still without a first and last name, the book reached adulthood, a natural and courageous adulthood. It made its own way through life and I had to acknowledge it, at last. Now the "captain's verses," signed by the genuine captain, tramp the roads, that is, bookstores and libraries.

END OF EXILE

My exile was nearing its end. It was the year 1952. We crossed Switzerland en route to Cannes to catch an Italian ship that would take us to Montevideo. This time we didn't want to see anyone in France. Alice Gascar, my loyal translator and long-time friend, was the only one I notified that we were passing through. In Cannes, however, something unexpected awaited us.

On the street, near the shipping line, I met Paul Eluard and his wife, Dominique. They had heard I was coming and were waiting to invite me to lunch. Picasso would also be there. Then we ran into the Chilean painter Nemesio Antúnez and his wife, Inés Figueroa; both would also be at the lunch.

It was the last time I would see Paul Eluard. I picture him in the Cannes sunlight wearing a blue pajama-like suit. I shall never forget his tanned, ruddy face, his intense blue eyes, his infinitely boyish smile, under the African light of the glaring streets in Cannes. Eluard had come from Saint-Tropez to say goodbye to me; he had brought Picasso along and had arranged the lunch. The party was all set.

A stupid, unforeseen incident ruined my day. Matilde did not have a visa for Uruguay. We had to hurry over to that country's consulate. We took a taxi and I waited at the door. Matilde smiled optimistically when the consul came out to receive her. He looked like a nice boy. He was humming a melody from *Madame Butterfly* and wasn't dressed much like a consul: an undershirt and walking shorts; and it never occurred to her that during their conversation the fellow would turn into a common extortioner. With his Pinkerton looks, he wanted to charge for overtime and raised all sorts of obstacles. He had us chasing around all morning. At lunch the bouillabaisse tasted like bitter gall to me. It took Matilde several hours to get her visa. Pinkerton dug up more and more red tape by the second: she had to have her photograph taken, to change dollars into francs, to pay for a long-distance call to Bordeaux. The fee for a transit visa that should have been free came to more than $120. I even started thinking that Matilde would miss the boat, and I wasn't going to leave either. For a long time I recalled this as one of the bitterest days in my life.

RANDOM OCEANOGRAPHY

I am an amateur of the sea. For years I have been collecting information that is of little use because I usually navigate on land.

Now I am returning to Chile, to my oceanic country, and my ship is approaching the coasts of Africa. It has now passed the ancient Pillars of Hercules, armed today to serve one of the last bulwarks of imperialism.

I observe the sea with the complete detachment of a true oceanographer, who knows its surface and its depth, without literary pleasure, but with a connoisseur's relish, a cetacean's palate.

I have always enjoyed sea stories and I have a fish net in my library. The books I like to look up the most are William Beebe's or a good monograph on the Volutidae of the Antarctic Ocean.

Plankton interests me—the nutricious waters, molecular and electrified, that stain the sea like violet lightning. Thus I came to know that whales feed almost exclusively on these infinitely proliferating sea creatures. The tiniest plants and unreal Infusoria overrun our shaky continent. Whales open their enormous mouths as they shift from place to place, raising their tongues to their palates to let these living and visceral waters fill and nourish them. That is the feeding method of the glaucus whale (*Rhachianectes glaucus*), which goes past my Isla Negra windows on its way to the South Pacific and the tropical islands.

That is also the migratory route of the sperm or toothed whale, the most Chilean of hunted whales. Chilean sailors used them to illustrate the folkloric world of the sea. On their teeth the knives

of the sailors scrimshawed hearts and arrows, tiny memorials to love, childish drawings of their ships or their sweethearts. But our whalers, the boldest in the watery hemisphere, did not traverse the Strait of Magellan and Cape Horn, the Antarctic and its furies, simply to unstring the teeth of the menacing sperm whale, but to seize its treasure of blubber and, especially, the tiny sac of ambergris this monster hides in its mountainous abdomen.

I am coming from somewhere else now. I have left behind me the last blue sanctuary of the Mediterranean, the grottoes, the marine and submarine contours of the island of Capri, where the sirens climbed on the rocks to comb out their blue hair, for the churning of the sea had dyed and drenched their wild tresses.

In the Naples aquarium I was able to see the electrical molecules of primeval organisms and a jellyfish soaring and falling, made of silver and vapor, fluttering in its solemn blue dance, girdled below by the only electric belt any lady of the deep has ever worn.

Many years ago in Madras, in the gloomy India of my youth, I paid a visit to a marvelous aquarium. I can still see the shiny fish, the poisonous morays, the schools of fish dressed in fire and rainbow, and, more than that, the super-serious octopuses with their measured strides, metallic computers with innumerable eyes, legs, suckers, and stored-up information.

Of the giant octopus we all encountered for the first time in Victor Hugo's *The Toilers of the Sea* (Victor Hugo is also a tentacled and polymorphous octopus of poetry), of that species I only got to see the fragment of an arm in Copenhagen's Museum of Natural History. This was indeed the legendary kraken, terror of the ancient seas, who would seize a sailing vessel and drag it down, covering it, entangling itself around it. The fragment I saw, preserved in alcohol, indicated that the creature was more than thirty meters long.

But what I was really after was the trail, or rather the body, of the narwhal. Since my friends knew next to nothing about the giant sea unicorn of the North Seas, I came to feel that I was the narwhal's exclusive spokesman and to believe that I, too, was a narwhal.

Does the narwhal exist? Can such an extraordinarily pacific sea creature with an ivory lance four or five meters long on its brow,

striated from tip to tip in the style of Solomon, and ending in a needle, can it and its legend, its marvelous name, go unnoticed by millions of human beings?

Of its name—narwhal or narwal—I can only say that it is the most beautiful of undersea names, the name of a sea goblet that sings, the name of a crystal spur. Then why doesn't anyone know its name? Why isn't there anyone with Narwal for a last name, or a beautiful Narwal building, even a Narwal Ramírez or a Narwala Carvajal?

There aren't any. The sea unicorn is shrouded in mystery, in its currents and transmarine shadows, with its long ivory sword submerged in unexplored oceans. In the Middle Ages, hunting unicorns was a mystical, an aesthetic sport. The land unicorn lives on forever in tapestries, a dazzling creature surrounded by alabastrine ladies with high coiffures, aureoled in its majesty by birds that trill or flash their brilliant plumage. As for the narwhal, medieval monarchs considered it a magnificent gift and sent one another fragments of its fabulous body. From it, one scraped a powder which, diluted in liqueurs, bestowed—O eternal dream of man!—health, youth, and virility.

Wandering around one day somewhere in Denmark, I entered an old shop where objects of natural history were for sale—a business, unknown in our America, that holds great fascination for me. There, in a corner, I discovered three or four narwhal horns. The largest was five meters long. I thrust and parried with them and stroked them for a long while.

The old man who owned the shop watched me tilting, with an ivory lance in my hands, at imaginary windmills, invisible windmills of the sea. Then I replaced each one in its corner. All I could buy myself was a tiny one, from a baby narwhal, one of those which go out to explore the cold Arctic waters with their innocent spur.

I put it away in my suitcase, but in a small *pension* facing Lake Leman in Switzerland I had a craving to see and touch the sea unicorn's magic treasure. And I took it out of my suitcase.

I can't find it now.

Did I leave it lying somewhere in the Vésenaz *pension*, or did it roll under the bed at the last minute? Or could it have returned in some unaccountable way to the polar circle one night?

I look at the small waves of a new day on the Atlantic.
On either side of its bow, the ship leaves a white, blue, and sulphuric gash of water, foam, and churned-up depths.
The portals of the ocean are trembling.
Over them soar diminutive flying fish, silver and translucent.
I am on my way back from exile.
I gaze at the waters a long time. I am sailing over them to other waters: the tormented waves of my coun—

huge green palace of

10

Voyage and Homecoming

A LAMB IN MY HOUSE

I HAD a relative, a senator who, having triumphed in some recent elections, came to spend a few days at my house in Isla Negra. That's how the story of the lamb begins.

Well, the senator's most enthusiastic supporters came to throw a feast for him. On the first afternoon of the feasting, a lamb was cooked in the Chilean country style, with a huge fire outdoors and the animal's body stuck on a wooden spit. This is called "roast on the stick" and is enjoyed with lots of wine and plaintive creole guitars.

Another lamb was being kept for the following day's festivities. While his fate hung in the balance, he was tethered outside my window. All night long, he moaned and cried, bleating and complaining of his loneliness. It was heartbreaking to listen to the lamb's modulations, so much so that I decided to get up at dawn and abduct him.

I put him in a car and drove a hundred and fifty kilometers to my house in Santiago, where the knives would not get him. He had no sooner arrived than he set to munching greedily on the choicest things in my garden. He loved the tulips and didn't spare a single one. He didn't take liberties with the rosebushes, for thorny reasons, but he gobbled down the gillyflowers and the lilies with uncanny delight. There was nothing I could do but tether him again. And he set to bleating at once, obviously trying to move my heart as he had done before. I was desperate.